



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Pinedale Region

## July 2016 Newsletter

### Backcountry Spawning

The statewide fish spawning crew of Kris Holmes, Pete Feck and Jake Brown, out of Pinedale, conducted a week-long spawning operation of Colorado River cutthroat trout up at North Piney Lake recently. Located seven miles in from the trailhead, North Piney Lake is home to a genetically pure population of wild Colorado River cutthroats. Thus, eggs are periodically collected from this population to bring new fish and new genetics into the brood stock housed at the Daniel Fish Hatchery. The crew's equipment is flown in by helicopter. Only a tablespoon of eggs are collected

from each female so as to not cut into the natural recruitment in the lake. A total of 50 pairs are captured and spawned totaling approximately 15,500 eggs.

After serious declines across its range, the Colorado River cutthroat trout was petitioned for listing as an endangered species. At the time, it was determined to be warranted, but was not listed in favor of concentrating on other species in greater need. The Game and Fish Department's Daniel Hatchery is the sole source of Colorado River cutts for Wyoming and is vital in keeping the species from being listed. Fish are stocked in several area waters each year. Photos by Pete Feck, WGFD







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## Wyoming Range Mule Deer Initiative

Pinedale Habitat Biologist Jill Randall has been working with several partners to implement the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Habitat Project. As part of that multi-year effort another prescribed fire was completed on the west slope of Miller Mountain in the head of Dutch George Creek west of LaBarge. This 400 acre aspen treatment is the first aspen unit to be burned for the Wyoming Range Mule Deer treatments that were started in 2014. In total, there will be nearly 10,000 acres of aspen treated over the next six years. Treatments consist of a combination of mechanical slashing of conifers to create additional fuel for a prescribed burn and cut & pile burning of aspen.

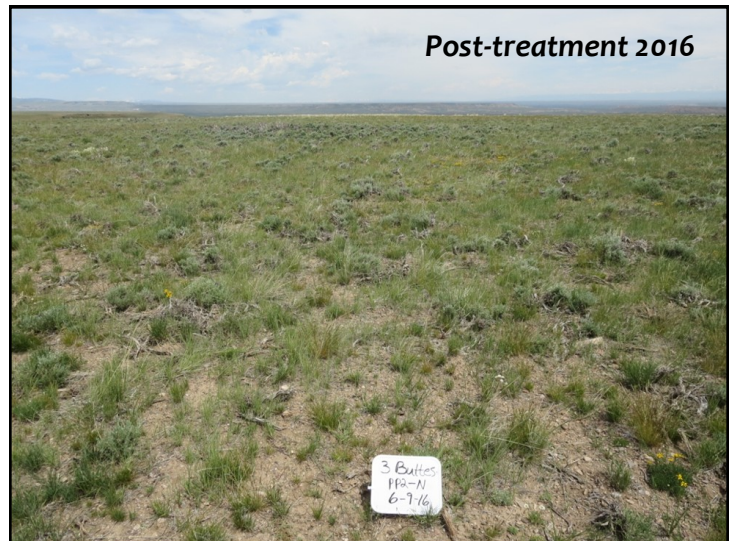
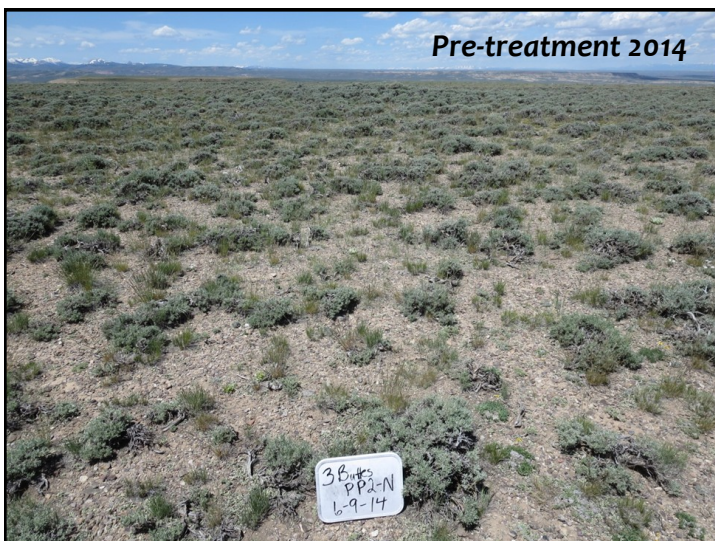
All treatments will target winter, transitional and summer range habitat for mule deer in the Big Piney-LaBarge area as a part of the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Initiative. Managers plan to treat over 30,000 acres over the next several years to improve sagebrush, mountain shrubs and aspen communities. In addition, approximately 2,000 acres of cheatgrass will be sprayed with herbicide annually to improve overall range conditions and ensure success of the other treatments. Funding partners, to date, include WY Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, WY Landscape Conservation Initiative, WY Game and Fish, WY Governor's Big Game License Coalition, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Fanatics Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, Denbury, Exxon and BLM.



Photos by Jill Randall

## The Results Are In!

The first sagebrush treatments implemented in 2014 for Wyoming Range mule deer in the LaBarge area were revisited in June and the results are looking excellent! Leader production on sagebrush is phenomenal, which means more food for wintering deer and the flush of grass and forbs is great for mule deer, sage grouse, elk, pronghorn and livestock that use the treatment areas. There are approximately 20,000 acres of shrub treatments identified for treatment over the eight years as part of the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Initiative.







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### Combing the Calving Grounds

With the peak of elk calving season in early June, Pinedale and Jackson Brucellosis-Feedground-Habitat (BFH) Biologists were busy finding Vaginal Implant Transmitters (VITs) that they had implanted in pregnant elk cows earlier this past winter.

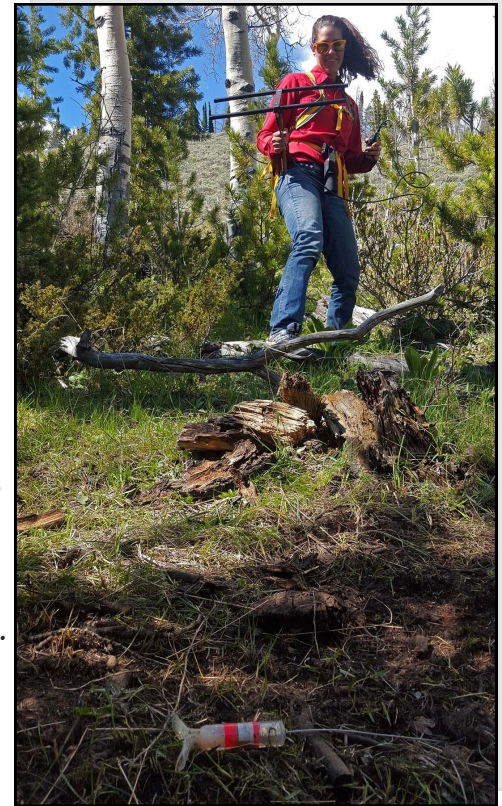
The BFH crew spent much of June regularly monitoring about 50 collared elk implanted with VITs from the ground and air. The first VIT expelled due to parturition this year occurred on May 11<sup>th</sup> and the last VIT associated with a birthing event was expelled on July 7<sup>th</sup>, with births peaking around June 1.



On occasion, when searching for the expelled Vaginal Implant Transmitters, the newborn elk calf is seen at the site.

Photo by WGFD

Since 2006, BFH Biologists have been capturing cow elk at various feedgrounds throughout the Jackson and Pinedale Regions and implanting pregnant cows. The transmitters are expelled when the calf is born, or aborted. By identifying elk calving, or parturition, areas, wildlife and livestock managers can work together to keep livestock and elk separate at this critical time of year to help reduce the risk of brucellosis transmission to cattle.



Pinedale Habitat Biologist Cheyenne Stewart locates a vaginal implant transmitter expelled at an elk's birthing site. Photo by Jared Rogerson, WGFD

### Tracking Pinedale's Burrowing Owls

A total of 14 burrowing owls have been captured and marked on the Pinedale Mesa south of Pinedale as part of a cooperative research project with Courtney Conway (Leader, Idaho Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit) and Lindsey Sanders (graduate student, Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Chalfoun Lab). The owls captured included four females, five males, and five juveniles from five different nest sites on the Mesa. A satellite transmitter, attached via backpack (shown left) was deployed on three of the females. Otherwise, all captured owls were fitted with a numbered leg band and body measurements were recorded. The satellite transmitters were deployed as part of a rangewide project on burrowing owls that includes nine western states and two Canadian provinces. Researchers hope to get daily locations of the Wyoming owls as they migrate south to their wintering grounds and back to Wyoming in the spring. The goal of this project is to document wintering locations and migration routes of burrowing owl populations throughout their breeding range, and to determine if some populations of breeding burrowing owls are declining more than others due to where they spend the winter months.



A female burrowing owl is equipped with a satellite transmitter. The custom-fitted backpack straps are made of Teflon. Several owls captured have since been sighted on the Mesa with their transmitters intact.





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## Mountain Man Rendezvous

Game and Fish personnel from both the Fish and Wildlife Divisions again participated in the annual Mountain Man Rendezvous in Pinedale. One of the statewide fish stocking trucks was in the parade and well over 200 people visited the educational booth highlighting fish, aquatic invasives and large carnivores.



## Teaching the Teachers

Wildlife Biologist Dean Clause, Habitat Biologist Jill Randall and Regional Information and Education Specialist Mark Gocke all provided talks to six different groups of teachers from across the country who were attending the Safari Club's American Wilderness Leadership School. Local Game and Fish personnel have been meeting with the AWLS teachers camps for many years to discuss a variety of local wildlife management issues such as maintaining big game migrations, sage grouse management, elk feedgrounds & brucellosis, funding and so on.





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### Curlews Head South

Interestingly, just as we're heading into the peak of the summer in northwest Wyoming, curlews are already heading south towards their wintering areas in Mexico. Currently, only two of the eight Wyoming satellite-tagged birds remain in the state. One in Daniel and one in the Jackson area.

Of the three birds marked in the Daniel area, one (JC) appears to have gone down for unknown reasons on July 8 near the Grand Canyon and is presumed to have died. Another, KC who migrated to the north end of the Gulf of California last fall, is now east of Guaymas, Sonora Mexico, which represents a significant and unexpected shift from last year. Will be interesting to see where she ends up for the winter. The other marked bird remains in the Daniel area likely tending a brood.



*Pinedale Game and Fish Office Manager Kristen Draney and her two children Mari and Colton release a long-billed curlew fitted with a backpack GPS transmitter near Daniel in June 2015.*

The only Jackson bird, AJ is starting her third documented migration south and is now in the Provo, Utah area. She migrated about two weeks later this year, leaving Jackson July 9-10 (compared to late June in 2014 and 2015). This year she and her marked male re-nested two times before successfully hatching a brood. Her male remains with the brood.

### Bald Eagle and Trumpeter Swan Numbers Strong

Susan Patla, Nongame Jackson, completed a two-day aerial survey in early June to document bald eagle productivity and trumpeter swan nest site occupancy in western Wyoming. Eagle productivity was robust with 56 nests producing a total of 93 young including four nests with three siblings. Such large broods used to be a much rarer occurrence. A total of 16 trumpeter swan nest sites were occupied in the Snake River drainage (50% incubating). Twice as many occupied sites were found in the Green River expansion project area with 26 occupied in the upper Green River (65% incubating), and an additional six occupied/incubating sites at Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge. Increasing number and distribution of nesting swans in the state demonstrates how a long-term, concentrated management effort has helped to secure the future for this iconic Wyoming SGCN (species of greatest conservation need) bird.







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## Managing Grizzlies and Livestock

Managing conflicts between grizzlies and humans is part of the “reality of recovery” when it comes to bringing a population back from the brink of extirpation. Pinedale Large Carnivore Biologist Zach Turnbull (Left) has been busy working with livestock managers in the Upper Green River drainage, investigating mortalities and working with range riders on how to prevent losses to grizzly bears. Only a handful of cattle have been lost due to predators so far this summer.

## Free Photography Workshop

Would you like to learn how to take better photographs of landscapes and wildlife? If so, join Wyoming Game and Fish Department photography intern Jessica Grant for a free photography workshop. The workshop will be held Tuesday, August 2, from 2-4 p.m. at the Pinedale Game and Fish office (432 East Mill St.). Participants should bring a camera and RSVP to Jessica Grant at [jessica.grant1@wyo.gov](mailto:jessica.grant1@wyo.gov).



## Honoring a Veteran Pilot

The Pinedale Region hosted the most recent Game and Fish Commission meeting. One of the highlights was the honoring long-time and beloved pilot Dave Savage and his wife Nora. After 40 years of keeping Game and Fish personnel safe in the western Wyoming skies, Dave and Nora have become part of the family. At Right, South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft gets a chuckle as he shares stories and recognizes the two on behalf of the Wyoming Game Wardens Association. Many past and present employees showed up for the event.





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## Whiskey Mountain Camp Makeover

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has launched a campaign to raise money to renovate and preserve the Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp outside Dubois, Wyoming. The facility has been home to conservation education camps for youth, families and others for decades and is in need of repair to ensure it can be used for decades to come.

“The Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp has served as the center of conservation education for Game and Fish for many

years. The camp is in desperate need of some substantial upgrades in order to use it for future conservation education,” said Scott Talbott, director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

The Game and Fish Commission voted in January to fund \$2 million of the estimated \$4.5 million renovation costs. The Commission directed the Game and Fish to fundraise the remaining \$2.5 million. The fundraising team, led by Game and Fish Commissioner Richard Klouda, is working with the National Bighorn Sheep Interpretive Association in Dubois to work toward raising needed support.



“The goal of the upgrades is to maintain a location to serve anyone interested in conservation education,” said Jason Hunter, Game and Fish wildlife supervisor for the Lander Region.

The Department team responsible for planning the renovations, was guided by public input and a formal recommendation process. The planned renovations include replacing waterlines, upgrading electrical service and constructing group and cabin areas that are compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).



The Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp is located within Whiskey Basin Wildlife Habitat Management Area, which is crucial winter range for bighorn sheep, elk and mule deer. In order to minimize disturbance and maintain habitat function, all major construction activities will occur during the summer outside of winter closure dates of Dec. 1 - May 15 .

“If everyone who sees the value in conservation education and investing in the future of wildlife contributes just \$1, we will exceed our goal in no time,” said Information and Education Specialist Rene Schell with Game and Fish.







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### Sticky Purple Geranium

By Troy Fieseler, Habitat Biologist Technician

The beauty of summer is upon us...with warm temperatures, green landscapes, abundant wildflowers, and wildlife with young by their sides. With such beauty, it may seem that life is easy for all, including our wild animals. However, this is an important time of year for wildlife, including mule deer, and one that comes with high energy demands.



A doe mule deer caring for her fawns is in constant need of a quality diet due to the high energy expenditures of producing milk. A plant that provides some of this high quality forage is Sticky Purple Geranium (*Geranium viscosissimum*). Purple Geranium is a native perennial growing 15 – 35 inches tall and is found throughout a range of varying landscapes of native, dry, open or semi-shaded sites, mountain meadows, from the foothills to montane habitats. Its leaves are mostly basal and long deeply palmated, with sharply cut and toothed like edges. The flowers range in color from pink to purple with strong purple veins and can be found blooming continuously from May through August. The sticky nature of its leaves gives this geranium its name. The stickiness acts as a trap to insects which the plant then consumes; dissolving proteins and absorbing nitrogen. This unique characteristic, called protocarnivorous, enables plants to thrive in nutrient-poor soils.

#### Pros:

- Drought tolerant
- Does not require full sunlight
- Adapted to various soils – dry and moist

According to data collected as part of the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Project, up to 45 percent of a deer's diet can be comprised of geranium during the summer months, with the highest percentage occurring in July.

Geranium also is a keystone species in the Tall Forb community type, found primarily in the Wyoming, Salt, Gros Ventre and Teton Ranges in western Wyoming. It is commonly found in association with single flowered sunflower, wild carrot, larkspur, cinquefoil, and aster-like species above 7,000 feet elevation in forb-dominated wildflower meadows. These communities are significantly important for their forage value, but also for holding together the headwaters of many watersheds, acting like a sponge by soaking up summer rains, and preventing erosion and sedimentation.

